

**PNEUMATIC LOCKING PIN OPERATING SYSTEM FOR A TRAILER SLIDER****BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

- [1] The present invention relates to a trailer slider system, and more particularly to an operating system and parking brake interlock for the locking pins thereof.
- [2] Heavy combination vehicles typically include a tractor and one or more trailers. Trailers often incorporate a movable subframe commonly referred to as a slider. A slider generally includes a pair of axles, a suspension, and an apparatus for adjusting and locking the position of the slider along the length of the trailer. Typically, a linkage is actuated and locking pins are moved to engage selected holes in the frame rails of the trailer. With the locking pins retracted from the holes, the slider position may be adjusted along the length of the frame rails. Once the slider reaches a desired position, the actuation element is operated and the locking pins are extended into the trailer frame holes.
- [3] One challenge with the use of a slider is ensuring that the locking pins are engaged in the holes before the tractor begins to pull the trailer. Disadvantageously, if the locking pins are not fully engaged, then it may be possible for the slider to move relative the trailer.
- [4] Various known systems interlock the parking brake to the locking pin position. In one of these systems, if the locking pins are not engaged, then a valve will be in a position preventing flow of pressurized air to the parking brake control valve. As is known, vehicle parking brakes typically include a large spring that moves to set the brake, preventing movement of the trailer. With the parking brakes set, the trailer cannot move. Thus, this known system prevents the trailer from moving unless the locking pins are engaged.
- [5] Trailers are equipped with an air supply line that is used to charge the trailer air reservoir and to retract the parking brakes. A parking brake control valve directs air to the parking brakes and then to the reservoir. This valve also prevents loss of reservoir pressure when the supply line is disconnected. The reservoir supplies pressurized air to operate the service brakes and is also used for various other applications on the trailer. Another known system provides a pin interlock valve that vents the supply line from the tractor and blocks any flow at the inlet to the parking brake control valve. Thus, in this known system when the interlock valve vents the supply of pressurized air, the reservoir will not charge.

- [6] Blocking the inlet to the parking brake control valve may actually lock the parking brakes in a release position if they are already released prior to the locking pins moving out of engagement. That is, if the parking brakes are released, and for whatever reason the pins are then withdrawn, the parking brakes cannot be set, and would stay in the released position. Furthermore, when the valve opens to vent the flow of air from the pressurized air supply line, the valve blocks the line leading to the parking brake control valve. This could potentially lock the air already in the parking brake chamber, again holding the brake away from the parked position.
- [7] Another problem with the prior art arrangement is that if the reservoir is not charged when the supply line is vented, there may not be air to drive accessories. Many of the locking pin drives are pneumatically powered and in the absence of pressurized air in the reservoir, these systems may not permit actuation of the locking pins.
- [8] Accordingly, it is desirable to provide a locking pin system that is readily actuated yet provides failsafe engagement of the slider with the trailer.

### **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

- [9] The locking pin system according to the present invention permits adjustment of a slider relative to a trailer. The locking pin system is operated through an air spring which rotates a torque tube to remove a spring bias from a multiple of locking pins. Operation of the locking pin system is controlled by a trailer spring brake valve which operates in response to actuation of the slider parking brakes.
- [10] A trailer spring brake valve resets a pull handle valve in response to the parking brakes being disengaged. Even if the locking pin air spring is in an actuated position, releasing of the parking brakes causes the trailer spring brake valve to reset and vent air pressure from the locking pin air spring.
- [11] If the locking pins are not aligned with openings in the frame rail when the locking pin system is released, later movement of the slider rail relative the frame rail will eventually align the openings and permit the locking pins to lock the slider to the trailer.
- [12] The present invention therefore provides a locking pin system that is readily actuated yet provides failsafe engagement of the slider with the trailer.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

- [13] The various features and advantages of this invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description of the currently preferred embodiment. The drawings that accompany the detailed description can be briefly described as follows:
- [14] Figure 1 is a general view of an exemplary vehicle embodiment for use with the present invention;
- [15] Figure 2 is a perspective view of the slider and locking pin system;
- [16] Figure 3 is a top planar view of the slider and locking pin system;
- [17] Figure 4 is an expanded view of one locking pin and associated spring bias assembly;
- [18] Figure 5A is a side view of an actuator assembly that actuates the locking pin system.
- [19] Figure 5B is a top view of the actuator assembly of Figure 5A;
- [20] Figure 6 is a schematic view of a vehicle pneumatic system for use with the present invention;
- [21] Figure 7A is a flowchart showing system operation in response to releasing of the parking brakes; and
- [22] Figure 7B is a flowchart showing system operation in response to setting of the parking brakes.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT**

- [23] Figure 1 illustrates a general view of a trailer and slider combination 10. The trailer 12 is supported by the slider 14, which carries the wheels, suspension, brakes, etc. The slider 14 is typically movable between several positions (Position 1, Position 2, etc.) as desired. It should be understood that although a particular component arrangement is disclosed in the illustrated embodiment, other arrangements will benefit from the instant invention.
- [24] Referring to Figure 2, the trailer 12 typically includes a pair of frame rail 16 having openings 18. The slider 14 has its own rails 20 which carries a locking pin system 22. An actuator 24 is operable to retract the locking pin system 22 and permit the slider to move relative to the trailer, which allows adjustment of the position of the slider (Figure 1).

[25] The actuator assembly 24 preferably includes an air spring 26 that drives a lever 28 mounted to a torque tube 30. Rotation of the torque tube 30 rotates a bracket 32. The bracket 32 rotates to change the position of a set of links 34. A locking pin 38 is mounted to each of the links 34. Each of the locking pins 38 selectively extends into and is retracted from the openings 18 in each frame rail 16 of the trailer 12. It should be understood that although a single pair of locking pins 38 are specifically described, any number of locking pins, preferably four, and associated links may be engaged with the torque tube 30.

[26] The multiple of incrementally spaced openings 18 along the length of the frame rails 16 provide engagement positions for the slider 14. The locking pins 38 engage in a selected set of openings 18 to lock the slider to the frame rails 16 at a selected position. The locking pins 38 are preferably mounted through a spring bias assembly 42, which is a known and is illustrated in a somewhat simplified manner in Figure 2.

[27] Referring to Figure 4, the spring bias assembly 42 permits the torque tube 30 to rotate and the link 34 to be drawn away from the locking pin 38 even if the pin 38 is temporarily trapped in the frame rails 16. That is, the link 34 is pulled away from the stuck pin 38 but pin remains in place within the frame rails 16 typically due to the pin 38 being pinched between the frame rail 16 and the slider rail 20. It should be understood that although only a single pin is illustrated in Figure 4, this is for example only and that any pin may become "pinched" and that each spring bias assembly is independently operational.

[28] The movement of the link 34 relative the pinched pin 38 is accommodated by a link spring 44 which otherwise maintains pressure on the pin 38 to assure the pin 38 is fully seated between the frame rail 16 and the slider rail 20. Once the trapped pin is freed from the frame rail 16, such as by slightly moving the trailer, a pin spring 46 drives the pin out of the frame rail hole 18 as the bias from link spring 44 is removed from the pin 38. That is, the pin spring 46 is normally compressed by the link spring 44 and that compression is only overcome when the link 34 is retracted by the actuator 24.

[29] Referring to Figure 5A, the actuator 24 is mounted to a cross-brace 46 between the rails 20 of the slider 14. The lever 28 preferably includes a four-bar linkage 48 (also illustrated in Figure 5B) to direct the motion of the air spring 26. Actuation of the air spring 26 operates the locking pin system 22 to move the pins 38 toward a non-engaged position.

When the air spring 26 is vented, the torque upon the torque tube 30 is relaxed and the link spring 44 (Figure 3) biases each of the associated pins 38 toward the openings 18.

[30] Referring to Figure 6, a pneumatic system 50 for the slider 14 generally includes a multiple of suspension air springs 52, an air spring ride height valve 54, a locking pin hand valve 56, an air reservoir 58, a trailer spring brake valve 60 and a pilot relay valve 62. The actuator 24 is preferably operated by pressing the hand valve 56. Operation of the hand valve 56 permits pressurization of the air spring 26 from the reservoir 58 and the resultant disengagement of the locking pin system 22 as described above. The hand valve 56 is preferably mounted directly on the slider 14.

[31] Operation of the locking pin system 22 is controlled by the trailer spring brake valve 60, which operates as a control in response to the parking brakes. The trailer spring brake valve 60 communicates with the hand valve 56 through a pilot port conduit 64. When the parking brakes are released (Figure 7A), air pressure is communicated from the tractor air supply to disengage the spring brakes. As is known, vehicle parking brakes typically include a spring that moves to set the parking brakes when air is released from the air chambers that prevents movement of the trailer. When the parking brakes are disengaged air pressure is also communicated through the pilot port conduit 64 to lock the hand valve 56 to prevent operation thereof.

[32] Conversely, when the parking brakes are engaged (Figure 7B), air pressure is vented from the spring brakes and mechanical springs engage the spring brakes. Also, air pressure is vented from the hand valve 56 through the pilot port conduit 64 such that the hand valve 56 may be operated. Operation of the hand valve 56 when the parking brakes are set communicates air pressure from the reservoir 58 through the hand valve 56 and into the actuator 24 to disengage the locking pin system 22.

[33] The trailer spring brake valve 60 resets the hand valve 56 whenever the parking brakes are disengaged. Releasing of the parking brakes pressurizes the hand valve 56 through the pilot port conduit 64 such that the hand valve 56 cannot be operated. That is, when the spring brakes are pressurized or deactivated by air pressure from the air supply, the hand valve 56 is also pressurized to prevent operation of the hand valve 56. Even if the air spring 26 is in a pressurized condition and the locking pin system 22 is disengaged, releasing

of the parking brakes vents the air pressure from the air spring 26 through the hand valve 56 to permit re-engagement of the locking pin system 22. In other words, the mechanical spring bias of both the spring brake parking brakes and the locking pin system take over when the parking brakes are deactivated through supply of air pressure from the air supply.

[34] The locking pin system 22 is deactivated whenever the parking brakes are not engaged. When the air spring 26 of the actuator is vented, the link spring 44 biases the pin 38 toward an engaged position (Figure 4). That is, the torque tube 30 is released and the links 34 no longer provide a force which maintains the pins 38 in the non-engaged position.

[35] If the openings 18 in the frame rail 16 are not aligned with the locking pins 38, later movement of the slider 14 relative the frame rail 16 will eventually align the locking pins 38 with the openings 18 which will permit the link spring 44 to engage the pin 38 and lock the slider 14 to the trailer 12. Failsafe engagement of the slider 14 to the trailer 12 is thereby achieved.

[36] Although particular step sequences are shown, described, and claimed, it should be understood that steps may be performed in any order, separated or combined unless otherwise indicated and will still benefit from the present invention.

[37] The foregoing description is exemplary rather than defined by the limitations within. Many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. The preferred embodiments of this invention have been disclosed, however, one of ordinary skill in the art would recognize that certain modifications would come within the scope of this invention. It is, therefore, to be understood that within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described. For that reason the following claims should be studied to determine the true scope and content of this invention.